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SUBJECT: Media Pledge Extends to Kabila and Bemba Camps

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11. (SBU) Summary: High-level representatives of both President Kabila and VP Bemba on September 4 signed a pledge to rein in their respective media. The Ambassador has heard from representatives of President Kabila that pro-Bemba broadcast media will be restored by the end of this week. The pledge will mean little without some move to get Bemba media back on the air. The question will indeed then become one of tempering its content. End Summary

12. (U) At its weekly press conference on September 6, MONUC Deputy Spokesman Jean-Tobie Okala rejected assertions that talks between the representatives of the two presidential candidates had stalled. In fact, he said, the two parties had formally committed themselves to a responsible use of their media outlets.

13. (U) The Embassy has obtained a copy of the agreement, signed September 4 by the Secretary General of VP Bemba's MLC party, Francois Muamba, and by President Kabila's Special Security Advisor, Samba Kaputo. The agreement is basically the same engagement drawn up by the High Media Authority (HAM) and signed by most of Kinshasa's television stations (reftel). That document is an engagement to abide by the law concerning press freedoms; notably, the pledge to abjure provocative speech. The HAM pledge also proscribes live political call-in shows, live reports from violent demonstrations, and shocking images during the electoral campaign period.

14. (U) In addition to this basic HAM pledge, Muamba and Kaputo formally pledged, by their signatures, not summarily to interrupt broadcast signals, arrest journalists, or prevent media from covering the entire country. They further pledged to denounce offensive broadcasts and to punish offenders (under their control), without prejudice to possible judicial investigations. Muamba and Kaputo further committed to contact one another so as immediately to redress any infractions to their agreement, and to respect all HAM decisions.

15. (SBU) Senior presidency representatives told the Ambassador September 7 that VP Bemba's media should be back on the air by the end of this week. Two Bemba television stations have been shut down since August 20 by the Ministry of Information, usurping regulatory authority vested in the HAM.

(SBU) Comment: The pledge signed by Muamba and Kaputo is one of several initiatives aimed at restoring some degree of confidence between the Bemba and Kabila camps and reducing tensions in Kinshasa. The pledge they signed will remain hollow, however, without some concrete moves to restore the signal to pro-Bemba media. There remains the question, however, of whether pro-Bemba broadcast journalists can overcome their reported fear of threats

made against them. There remains, too, the concern of just what Bemba media will try to say when it goes back on the air.

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